

American Trader Natural Resource Restoration Plan

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
California Department of Fish and Game – OSPR

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On February 7, 1990, the tanker American Trader spilled approximately 400,000 gallons of Alaska north slope crude oil into the Pacific Ocean offshore of Huntington Beach, California. The cargo tank was punctured twice by the vessel's own anchor while attempting to moor at the sea berth of the Golden West Terminal. The oil impacted ocean waters (60 square miles), shorelines, and marine organisms — including seabirds — and resulted in the closure of some heavily used recreational beaches for five weeks. The Trustee agencies estimate that as many as 3,400 birds died and 9,500 chicks were not born as a result. The Brown Pelican, a federally endangered species, was severely impacted with an estimated 195 dead birds. Other species in the area at the time of the spill included the Xantus' Murrelet, Ashy Storm Petrel and Western Grebe.

Settlement of Natural Resource Claims The United States and the State of California reached settlement with BP America, Inc., BP Oil Supply Company and BP Oil Shipping Company, USA in 1994. Due to court challenges, the settlement dollars were not available until 1998. The settlements covered the following:

- \$2,484,566 plus interest to the State and Federal Trustees to address seabird-related injuries;
- \$400,000 plus interest to the State of California for a white sea bass fish hatchery program;
- \$300,000 plus interest to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project for ocean and coastal pollution mitigation and monitoring projects;
- \$79,680 plus interest for revenue losses incurred by the California Department of Parks and Recreation; and
- \$630,000 plus interest to state agencies and local governments for response costs.

A separate state settlement (\$16 million) was reached in 1999 with Attranco, the owner of the American Trader, to address losses due to impacts to recreation.

Only the \$2,484,566 settlement related to seabird injuries is covered by the Restoration Plan.

The Restoration Plan The Restoration Plan was prepared jointly by the agencies listed above and included public input. Implementation of restoration projects began in 2001 and will continue for approximately five or six years. The intent of the collection of restoration projects is to compensate for injuries incurred during the spill and for any interim losses incurred during the period of recovery.

Creation, Enhancement and Protection of Brown Pelican Communal Roost Sites

Communal roost sites are essential habitat for the endangered Brown Pelican. Intense shoreline development, wetland filling, and other habitat alteration has eliminated much of the natural onshore roost habitat, particularly that used for the larger night roosts. These losses have been somewhat offset by artificial structures, such as jetties and breakwaters. Roost site creation projects will increase availability of high quality roosts along the southern California coastline. Roost site enhancement projects will be designed to increase the capacity or quality of existing roosts. Roost site protection projects will be aimed at (1) securing management jurisdiction over key roost sites in private ownership, (2) decreasing human disturbance at selected roost sites, and (3) development of a roost site database to protect essential brown pelican non-breeding habitat and identify future restoration project sites.

Western and Clark's Grebe Restoration The goal of this project is to increase Western and Clark's grebe populations by minimizing human disturbances to grebes at important nesting colonies. After scoters and pelicans, these grebes were the most prevalent dead species retrieved in the aftermath of the spill. Restoration options for grebe wintering areas offshore are limited. There are, however, potential effective restoration options at certain inland breeding grounds. Currently, human disturbance is a significant factor threatening grebe colonies during the nesting season. It is essential to work with local landowners and recreational lake users to develop cooperative plans that will minimize human disturbances during nesting and breeding seasons.

Seabird Nesting Habitat Restoration on Anacapa Island This project restores burrow or crevice and ground nesting seabird habitat on Anacapa Island, Channel Islands National Park, by eradicating the introduced black rat (*Rattus rattus*). Anacapa Island is one of only three California Channel Islands which historically had terrestrial predator-free breeding habitat for seabirds. The accidental introduction of black rats probably occurred during a shipwreck. These rats not only eat bird eggs — resulting in lost productivity — they also prevent Xantus' Murrelet and possibly Ashy Storm-Petrel from breeding over large portions of their potential nesting habitats at Anacapa Island. Successful rat eradications from other islands have used rodenticides. An ongoing study has evaluated and developed an environmentally sound plan for the application of brodifacoum, the rodenticide most commonly used by pest control professionals, and the most frequently used in successful rat eradication projects. Rigorous measures have been developed to protect non-target species through avoidance or mitigation.

International Efforts for Brown Pelican Restoration Over 90 percent of California Brown Pelicans are found breeding outside the U.S., in Mexico. It is likely that some pelicans associated with Mexican colonies further south were also present in California during the American Trader oil spill. Other injured seabirds that are international in their movements include: gulls, storm petrels, Xantus' Murrelets, and scoters. Potential international projects primarily include habitat protection and enhancement such as eradication of exotic species on Baja California Islands and seabird protection activities.

Public Education and Awareness The goal of this project is to provide information to increase public awareness concerning restoration goals and the conservation implications of our restoration projects. Public information and education programs have played important roles in increasing public awareness of marine conservation issues. Potential activities and programs are as follows:

- posters, brochures, videos, live video and other material describing the Anacapa Island rat eradication program and the program's benefits to seabirds and the island ecosystem;
- interpretive signs at pelican roost project sites informing the public of our actions at the site, and of the Brown Pelicans' and other seabirds' need for undisturbed roosting habitat;
- informational brochure about the hazards to pelicans and other seabird species of being hooked or entangled in fishing gear, and conservation measures anglers should take; and
- efforts and publications to inform anglers and the general public about the Brown Pelican closure area offshore the pelican breeding colony on West Anacapa Island (part of the Anacapa Island Ecological Reserve).